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ABSTRACT

This paper is a book review of William M. Phillips, Jr.'s "The School Sociologist: A Need and an Emergent Profession" (Washington, DC: University Press of America, Inc., 1981; 216p. ISBN-0-8191-1946-6. $12.95). Dr. Phillips defines a new professional field and expounds upon the role of the professionals within it. He seeks to combine factual knowledge as defined by the subordinate culture within the same society. The major theme of the book concerns the idea of the proposed profession of "school sociology." The establishment of the school sociologist professional (except as an occasional consultant) within the public schools is probably either too late or too soon. In short, the problems of sharing power, spending more money on consultant-type jobs, and the apparent admission of failure of the system mitigates against the idealistic goal of Dr. Phillips' book. Other issues included public versus private schools, what should be taught in schools, and other areas related to school sociologists, such as social interaction patterns and various school agency functions and structures. (BZ)

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Review of "The School Sociologist"*

by Scott B. Sigmon

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*This paper is a standard book review of William M. Phillips, Jr.'s The School Sociologist: A Need And An Emergent Profession (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1981; Pp. x, 261, $12.95, paper, ISBN 0-8191-1946-6, LCC 81-40051).

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The School Sociologist: A Need and an Emergent Profession is a unique book in that it defines a new professional field and expounds upon how the role of the professional within it can be carried out. The book is rather ambitious since the intended audience it seeks to reach is so very wide: 'public and non-public school administrators, government officials, social scientists, parents, student educators'. Although it would be enlightening for all segments of society to gain knowledge of Dr. Phillips' ideas contained within The School Sociologist, it is likely that most all readers except for the social scientists would not understand it. The writing style is comprehensive but technical in a sociological-theoretical sense. For example, see the passage quoted below:

> Two major theoretical perspectives dominate the social science scene - - positivism and phenomenology. The former involves broadly a search for the facts or the causes of social phenomena, and the latter involves broadly the search for insight or "understanding" of human behavior. The parts of this book are organized around the reflexive application of these two reality approaches to selected dimensions of schooling in the U.S. (p. 5)

For clarification purposes, Dr. Phillips - as do other sociologists of the reflexive school - seeks to combine factual knowledge as defined by the dominant culture with meaning as seen by the dominated culture within the same society.

The book's order of presentation is the standard, quite logical text-book format: introduction, followed by eight chapters, bibliography and index. The text goes from the general-theoretical to the more specific-technical, making a case for the subject of the title and then drawing a conclusion within present-day circumstances. Ā note on the physical appearance of the text is in order. The printed typestyle appears as though it is that of a typewriter. The entire text being single line spaced (except between paragraphs where it is double line spaced) makes it difficult to read. This same typestyle is found in the index, and although comprehensive, made it quite lengthy (52 pages).

Dr. Phillips, a professor of sociology of education, has expert knowledge of his subject matter. Also, having had conversation with Dr. Phillips, this reviewer knows that the author worked as a consultant for the Newark, NJ, Public School District approximately a decade ago. Newark is an urban district and NJ's largest, and this may have been the inspiration for Dr. Phillips to produce the work being reviewed.

The major issue of this book obviously concerns the idea of the proposed profession of a "school sociologist". It seeks to deal with schooling on what this reviewer calls a "systems level", both large (district-wide or larger) and small (classroom or a particular school). This approach has great merit for areas where many or most students are considered to be doing poorly in school. Why work with (remediate or specially educate) one or a few or even a large group of children, when the whole superstructure of a

school system could be changed to better meet their needs? This seems more practical, but as Dr. Phillips points out:

> From my view schooling historically exhibits an almost magnificent record of resistance to radical change in matters of inequality and injustice. (p. 186)

I could not agree more with Dr. Phillips' but there are three other very important interrelated aspects of resistance which should be discussed and will be here by way of contrast. The profession of school psychologist is already well entrenched within the public school setting. At present, the stated goal of virtually every doctoral level school psychology university degree-granting program is for training so that a maximum number of students can be helped; i.e., a systems level approach. This is a noble intention, but in practicality a waste of time and training resources. School administrators do not want to share decision-making power in most instances. Also, to have psychologists and/or sociologists re-designing the system is seen as very threatening since many negative implications could be inferred from this. Also, it would cost more to bring a new type of professional into an institution that is being faced with reduced funding in the early 1980s. The establishment of the school sociologist professional - except as an occasional consultant - within the public schools is either too late or too soon now. In short, the problems of sharing power, spending more money on consultant-type jobs, and the apparent admission of failure of the system mitigate against the idealistic goal of Dr. Phillips' book.

Other issues covered in this book are public versus private schools

(chapter 4, Public and Nonpublic Schooling: A Case of Mutual Accomodation), what should be taught in schools (chapter 7, Formal Knowledge and Schooling), and other areas that school sociologists should know such as social interaction patterns (e.g., between teacher and students) as well as various school agency functional structure.

Dr. Phillips concludes his work in the last chapter (How Does The Matter Now Stand?) by discussing two main themes. The first has to do with viewing schooling as a false dichotomy when its "institutionalized aspects" are seen separately from "other societal institutions (the family, social class, religion, the economy, etc.)". He believes they must be seen together and he wrote.

> I call attention to contradiction. Especially as it is confounded with those essential ideas of values on which contemporary schooling rests; and as it becomes visible in the theatre of real schooling experience through the stifling or perversion of the affective, cognitive and moral growth of human potentiality, the play of social power, the institutionalization of social control, the legitimation of class and race oppression, and why and how some knowledge - - rather than others - - comes to be acceptable. (p. 175)

The other theme he concludes with is that resistance to change and the establishment of the new profession will come from both "expected and unexpected" places:

> ...from many sociologists, public and nonpublic school administrators and their professional organizations, teachers and their professional organizations, those practitioners of social science disciplines already well institutionalized in existing educational bureaucracies, and elected and appointed governmental officials at the local, state and federal levels. (pp. 186-187)

The significance of this publication is substantial in terms of its

originality. School sociologists could definitely make a contribution to society at the school and/or school district level and would be a major area of what this reviewer sees as "applied sociology", similar in some respects to "urban planners". The book is of value to social scientists in addition to well educated administrators and government officials, but would be too difficult to grasp by lay persons in its present form.